

Internationalization

Algonquin College Academic White Paper

March 2009

Internationalization is one in a series of Academic Area white papers that includes:

- Academic Technologies
- Accommodating Increased Enrolment
- Applied Research
- Apprenticeship
- College Programming Strategy
- Community and Business Integration
- Enrolment
- Interprofessional Education
- Sustainability

These papers can be found at:
www.algonquincollege.com/VPAAcademic

PREFACE

In 2007, Algonquin College began a five-year strategic planning process to re-think its focus and set a direction in line with current trends and future needs. In the context of that strategic exercise, the Academic Area is exploring key questions about the ways the College may sustain its reputation, enhance its educational offering, and deliver that offering consistently across all programs. The following is one of ten papers addressing specific issues that demand forward-looking consideration

Authors

Helen Pearce (Co-Chair)

Peter Fortura (Co-Chair)

Jo-Ann Aubut

Linda Cooke

Cathie Edmond

Mark Hoddenbagh

Maria Schnurr

Marlene Tosh

CONTENTS

Preface

Executive Summary1

The Issue1

Background and Considerations.....2

Opportunities4

Recommendations5

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Algonquin College has been very successful in meeting the economic needs of its local community for the past 40 years. Indeed, Algonquin has truly been a “community college”. Today, however, our community, our industries, our employers, and hence, our students face a competitive environment that extends far beyond our local borders. Globalization is affecting all aspects of our economy and society, and there is a strong need for the College to adapt and to develop new initiatives to better prepare our students for success in the global economy.

This paper recommends a number of short-term and long-term initiatives that the College should take to help position our College and our students to be leaders in the global economy. If implemented over the next five years, these initiatives will re-position the College from a community college to a “global college”, resulting in a more complete educational experience for Canadian-born students, recent-immigrant students, and international students alike.

THE ISSUE

The Strategic Plan states that by 2013 Algonquin College will have “expanded the comprehensiveness of its international activities and opportunities to better prepare students for the global market realities faced by many organizations” (page 11). Indeed, an important academic leadership goal in the Strategic Plan is to “create opportunities for students to develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes to succeed in the global economy” (page 10).

The key issue or challenge to be addressed is that Algonquin College, as an institution, is not as global as it should be. The College has a large number of international activities, but the College does not have an international strategy. In other words, Algonquin College needs to expand from its community-based activities to more global-based activities, and needs to develop a framework that achieves two important outcomes: first, internationalize the curriculum; and, second, extra-curricular activities must be expanded, including international student recruitment, training for recent immigrants, and integration of our programs and students with the local and international community.

BACKGROUND AND CONSIDERATIONS

Algonquin College has, over the years, made significant attempts to bring international activities to the College. Thus, any new or expanded initiatives will build on an existing base of resources and current set of practices. Current examples of Algonquin College international activities should be broken down into two distinct areas: curricular and extra-curricular.

On the curriculum side, Algonquin has had a leadership position among Ontario Colleges in developing curriculum and programs to help recent immigrants adjust to the local workforce. Indeed, Algonquin plays an integral role in the city-wide support of new immigrants. The Settlement to Employment Program (STEP), in particular, in partnership with the City of Ottawa, helps foreign-trained workers. There are also a number of College Integrating Immigrants to Employment (CIITE) projects on campus in the areas of health-care, bridging programs, foreign-trained civil engineers, and in the Registrar's Office admissions process to better assess foreign credentials against our programs of study. Our language training programs for international students and recent immigrants are also well-recognized at home and abroad.

Algonquin has also been successful in delivering its own programs overseas, especially in India and China. This has allowed a number of College administrators, faculty, and support staff to experience international travel and different cultural practices that they can bring back to the College.

There has been very limited efforts to-date to internationalize the curriculum in our current programs of study. However, some notable examples in this area include a number of General Education elective courses in areas such as cultural diversity (FAM1218 A Cultural Diversity Quest), international media (GED1896 The Middle East: An Understanding of Media Sources and Their Impact), world religions (GED5006 World Religions), and multiculturalism (GEN2000 Film and Multiculturalism). Of particular note is ENV0003 Rain Forest and Tropical Science, which includes a class trip to Costa Rica as part of its learning requirements.

On the extra-curricular side, Algonquin has a significant international education presence, attracting over 450 international students to our postsecondary and graduate certificate programs in the Fall 2008 semester. In addition, there have been a number of Canadian College Partnership Projects, involving two-three week visits abroad for College students and faculty. Projects, such as the successful "Small World Big Picture", expose the College community to the world beyond its borders and, at the same time, allow prospective Canadian students to see that Algonquin focuses beyond its own local border.

Despite these positive initiatives, Algonquin College needs to broaden its international activities into new strategic areas where there are currently very limited or no projects. Most important among those would be short-term-for-credit international education opportunities for students, faculty exchanges with overseas colleges and universities, twinning Algonquin College with another college or university overseas, increasing our overseas training program offerings, and increasing international co-op placement opportunities for our students.

The major obstacle to Algonquin—and indeed to all colleges or universities—in increasing the internationalization of its programs is lack of financial and human resources. Until exchange programs become more affordable and faculty is provided with the incentives and the professional development required to change their curriculum, participation rates in such activities will not grow as required.

Considerations

Algonquin College is ideally positioned among Canadian colleges to be a leader in internationalizing curriculum, given our location among federal government departments such as the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, international agencies such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), foreign embassies, and a number of local firms that have a significant global presence through export markets. In some ways, Algonquin College is behind other Canadian colleges and universities that have made more concerted efforts to globalize their curriculum and/or provide their students with greater opportunities for international experience.

At a macroeconomic level, Algonquin College students must be prepared for the global economy, and must have developed not only the skills to compete but also the attitudes and knowledge to deal with others in a cross-cultural environment.

At an institutional level, Algonquin College has an ambitious plan to “increase enrolment in full-time programs to 20,000 students by the year 2020”, with some of the growth coming from increasing the number of recent-immigrant students and international students (page 8). A major factor in the academic success for these two particular groups of students will be the College’s ability to create a curriculum and an overall educational experience that builds on their international experiences.

While there are some specific actions we are recommending regarding internationalizing curriculum, we are also mindful that there needs to be a collective will to make changes and we can achieve this by supporting faculty who are including international activities in their courses and ensuring these examples are widely communicated so as to inspire and motivate others.

OPPORTUNITIES

The College has an exceptional opportunity to provide all our students with an engaging, globally-focused curriculum. With significant and appropriate professional development, Algonquin faculty can begin the process of “internationalizing the curriculum”, which means integrating an international dimension into all aspects of curriculum, including course content, course materials, teaching and learning methods, etc. Internationalized curriculum could include curriculum with an international subject (e.g. international relations, world religions), curriculum where a traditional subject area is broadened by including a global focus, or curriculum with content designed for international students.

Internationalizing the curriculum results in two important outcomes: the curriculum more closely reflects a Canadian society that is becoming less homogenous and more multicultural; and the curriculum prepares students to live and work as informed and productive citizens of the global economy.

Options

For Algonquin College and its students to succeed in a rapidly changing and increasingly competitive global economy, it must adopt a college-wide strategy that will result in an educational experience—curricular and extra-curricular—that prepares students for academic and career success. Algonquin’s international strategy must increase the number of international students on campus; provide a welcoming and supportive environment for our international students and recent-immigrant students that supports their academic success; help faculty to broaden their knowledge of the international context of their professional area; and help all staff to model appropriate cultural awareness and interpersonal behavior.

Without such a college-wide plan of action, Algonquin risks not achieving the important strategic goal of increasing enrolment in full-time programs to 20,000 students by the year 2020. Not acting also puts at risk the career prospects of all its students, who will be at a competitive disadvantage to others in their global knowledge and skills

RECOMMENDATIONS

Short Term (2008 – 2010)

- Increase the number of international opportunities for students to study abroad, in cooperation with the International Education Centre.
- Investigate ways that students can take foreign language training for credit in their programs of study.
- Establish a working group, with representatives from across the college community, to develop a strategy to embed internationalization initiatives across the college.
- Include internationalization competencies in The Professor of the 21st Century.
- Establish more opportunities for student and faculty international exchanges and communicate opportunities throughout the college community.
- During Kaleidoscope 2009, and on an ongoing basis, provide several Professional Development opportunities for faculty and staff related to internationalization issues, for example workshops on cultural sensitivity or working/teaching in a multi-ethnic environment.
- Add three new General Education courses in subjects meeting internationalization outcomes.
- Embed internationalization learning outcomes into course outlines, either through vocational learning outcomes or essential employability skills.
- Develop a core number of twinning, and articulation agreements with institutions abroad to provide international exchanges for faculty, staff, and students.
- Increase the number of international co-op placements for our students.
- Take advantage of our unique opportunity in Ottawa to engage with the international community, including embassies and international organizations.
- Consider a speaker series on international topics.
- The Academic Area to continue to work closely with the International Education Centre on international development projects.

Longer Term (2010 - 2013)

- Strengthen our program of welcoming and integrating international students into the Algonquin community by providing increased support for their academic success.
- Better prepare and inform international students prior to their arrival at Algonquin College, through an improved assessment process.
- Assess the internationalization of the curriculum through the ongoing Program Quality Review process.
- Consider the role that Human Resources can play in recruiting a more ethnically-diverse workforce.
- Encourage students to participate in service learning initiatives, such as the one at the Perth Campus where the Social Service Worker students work in El Salvador each year.